

Message Text

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SUBJ: BILL C-58: COMMITTEE HEARINGS--COMMENTARY

REF: OTTAWA 4416

1. REVENUE MINISTER CULLEN'S INTERPRETATION OF "NOT SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME" TO REQUIRE 80 PERCENT CANADIAN CONTENT IS GENERATING DISQUIET AMONG JOURNALISTS AND OTHERS WHO SEE IT AS A THREAT TO PRESS FREEDOM ESPECIALLY IF IT SHOULD EVER BE EXTENDED TO CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS WHICH DRAW HEAVILY UPON FOREIGN NEWS SERVICES. SOME SEE IT ALSO AS INHIBITING OVER THE LONGER TERM CANADIAN NEWS MAGAZINES, SUCH AS MACLEAN'S, WHICH WOULD BE PREVENTED FROM MAKING ARRANGEMENTS WITH PUBLICATIONS ABROAD TO BRING MORE WORLD NEWS TO CANADIAN READERS.

2. AMONG THE MORE PERCEPTIVE JOURNALISTS FOLLOWING THE HEARINGS IS GEOFFREY STEVENS OF THE TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL WHO IN HIS NOVEMBER 26 EDITORIAL PAGE COLUMN EXUDES A CERTAIN OPTIMISM THAT THE COMMITTEE WILL ATTEMPT TO HAVE BILL C-58 MODIFIED. EXCERPTS FROM HIS COLUMN FOLLOW:

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BEGIN QUOTE. ... BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT THINK

OUT ITS MAGAZINE POLICY, IT HAS BUMBLED AND STUMBLED INTO A POSITION WHERE IT IS TELLING ALL CANADIAN MAGAZINES: 'LOOK, WE DON'T TRUST YOUR CANADIAN OWNERS AND YOUR CANADIAN EDITORS TO SERVE YOUR CANADIAN READERS. THEREFORE, WE ARE SETTING DOWN A CONTENT RULE THAT YOU MUST OBEY.'

THE GOVERNMENT SAYS ITS MIND IS MADE UP. THE COURT OPTION HAS BEEN FORECLOSED. CAN ANYTHING BE DONE AT THIS LATE DATE? YES, THERE IS ONE SMALL GLIMMER OF HOPE--THE COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON BROADCASTING, FILMS AND ASSISTANCE TO THE ARTS.

TO DATE, THE COMMITTEE HAS HELD FOUR MEETING ON BILL C-58.

IT HAS, TO ITS SURPRISE, FOUND MORE INTEREST IN THE MAGAZINE ISSUE THAN IN ANYTHING SINCE THE 1966 INQUEST INTO THE CBC PROGRAM, THIS HOUR HAS SEVEN DAYS. EVERY COMMITTEE MEMBER IS IN HIS SEAT. IT'S STANDING ROOM ONLY FOR THE LOBBYISTS, LAWYERS, PRESS AND PUBLIC. THERE HAS BEEN SOME GOOD, INCISIVE QUESTIONING -- PARTICULARLY FROM LIBERALS JIM FLEMING (YORK WEST) AND JOHN ROBERTS (ST. PAUL'S) AND CONSERVATIVES DOUG ROCHE (EDMONTON-STRATHCONA) AND JAKE EPP (PROVENCHER). BUT SOME OF THE OTHERS SEEM HOPELESSLY MUDDLED. THEY SEEM UNABLE TO GRASP THAT 'CULLEN RULE' WOULD APPLY TO ALL CANADIAN MAGAZINES. THEY SEEM TO ASSUME THAT IF THEY MADE ANY CONCESSIONS TO TIME AND READER'S DIGEST, THE DOORS WOULD FLY OPEN AND IN WOULD RUSH A HOST OF FOREIGN MAGAZINES. OF COURSE, NEWSWEEK, MCCALLS, PLAYBOY AND SO ON, COULD COME RUSHING IN-AS LONG AS THEY ARE CANADIAN-OWNED AND CONTROLLED. THEY COULD HAVE COME IN UNDER THESE CONDITIONS AT ANY TIME SINCE THE EXISTING CLAUSES WERE PUT IN PLACE, 10 YEARS AGO. THEY DIDN'T. THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS, HOWEVER, ARE FAIR-MINDED PEOPLE AND THEY ARE GROPING TOWARD AN ACCOMMODATION. THIS POSSIBLY SURFACED YESTERDAY WHEN MR. ROBERTS ASKED PAUL ZIMMERMAN, THE PRESIDENT OF READER'S DIGEST, WHETHER THE DIGEST WOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET THE 75 PERCENT

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CANADIAN OWNERSHIP REQUIREMENT IF THE CONTENT RULE WERE QUIREMENT (SIC). HE DIDN'T GET A FIRM ANSWER. LATER, MR. ROCHE CAME BACK TO THE POINT, SAYING HE DETECTED A SENSE DEVELOPING IN THE COMMITTEE THAT THE CONTENT RULE COULD BE CHANGED IF THE MAGAZINES ACCEPTED THE OWNERSHIP PROVISION. THEN ROD BLAKER (L, LACHINE-LAKESHORE) ADVANCED THE SAME IDEA.

IT IS NOT CLEAR YET WHETHER THE SENSE THAT SEEMS TO BE EMERGING IN THE COMMITTEE WILL HARDEN INTO A CONSENSUS AND WHAT THAT MIGHT BE (TIME IS TALKING OF A NEW MAGAZINE 50 PERCENT DIFFERENT FROM ITS U.S. EDITION). NOR IS IT CLEAR WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT WOULD ACCEPT A CHANGE. IF THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED ONLY WITH DRIVING THE TWO MAGAZINES OUT OF THE COUNTRY, IT WILL REFUSE TO BUDGE. IF IT IS CONCERNED WITH BEING FAIR, IT WILL LISTEN CAREFULLY TO ANY REASONABLE ADVICE FROM THE ALL-PARTY COMMITTEE. END QUOTE.

3. COMMENT: GIVEN THE STRONG GOC DETERMINATION TO PUSH THROUGH BILL C-58 (FOR WHICH CLOSURE WAS INVOKED ON SECOND READING) IT IS FAR FROM CLEAR THAT STEVENS' LIMITED OPTIMISM IS WARRANTED. NEVERTHELESS, HIS VIEWPOINT IS INTERESTING.
JOHNSON

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